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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ANOTHER MEETING ON ELECTION REFORM

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua held a "consultative meeting on the electoral process" at the Presidential Villa in Abuja January 16. Participants included state governors, legislators, political parties, representatives of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and security officials. As a result of the meeting, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan has been charged with coordinating the work of four committees: an interparty committee, security committee, legislative committee, and the Governor's forum. The recommendations of these committees will form the agenda for a subsequent presidential meeting on election reform. Though it is positive to see the President publicly discussing the need for election reform, it is unlikely that the new committees will have any real impact, as they are composed of the same election officials, security services, and politicians who make up and benefit from the current electoral system. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In response to ongoing criticisms about the April 2007 state and national elections and the disorganized and sometimes violent recent local government polls in several states, President Yar'Adua invited INEC representatives, security officials (including the National Security Advisor), the heads of all political parties who currently hold office in at least one state, governors, and legislators to a meeting in Abuja January 16 to discuss Nigeria's "electoral crisis" and proposals for a way forward. Representatives of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), as well as All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), All Progressive's Grand Alliance (APGA), and Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) attended. Though the Action Congress (AC) leadership did not participate, Lagos Governor Babatunde Fashola (AC) did attend. During the meeting President Yar'Adua told participants and the media that the political elites themselves must change if the electoral system in Nigeria is to improve. The President said that "No matter the legislation, no matter the efforts we put at electoral reform, no matter the credibility of the electoral umpire, unless we political leaders change our attitude towards election, we will continue to have problems."

¶3. (U) As a way forward, President Yar'Adua tasked Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to coordinate the work of four new committees and explained that their recommendations would form the agenda for a subsequent presidential meeting on elections. An inter-party committee will be comprised of the

PDP, ANPP, APGA, and PPA. A security committee will be headed by the NSA General Mukhtar and will examine the role of security agencies in elections. A legislative committee will be headed by Senate President David Mark, and the final committee is the Governor's forum.

¶4. (C) Comment: Though it is important that President Yar'Adua continues to make election reform a topic of public discussion, it is not likely any breakthrough initiatives will come out of the newly formed committees. Their mandates are vague and no deadline has been announced for report back of their recommendations. Perhaps most troubling is the poor choice of leadership for this exercise. The committees are made up of government officials and politicians who created and benefit from the current system. The Vice President is not known to be energetic or thoughtful, so he is unlikely to add any value as "coordinator" of the committees. The Senate President is one of the biggest beneficiaries of Nigeria's flawed election system (and facing very real threat of losing his seat at tribunal), and the same is true for many of the Governors. Unfortunately, the only real value likely to be gained from this exercise is continued, high-level and public statements about the need for election reform. End comment.

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